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ON THE SACRED NAMES OF IAMOS AND ION: ETHNOBOTANICAL REFERENTS IN THE HERO'S PARENTAGE

The birth of a miraculous infant is the subject of the narrative in an ode which Pindar composed to celebrate the victory of his patron in a competition of mule teams at the religious sanctuary of Olympia. The patron was the prophet Hagesias and the infant was Iamos, an ancestor of Hagesias and the first in a continuous family line of prophets. The description of the birth is extraordinary, for the poet puns upon the name of Iamos to suggest the infant's transubstantial existence with a toxic plant which is apparently to be the source of his inspiration and the parentage for the child aligns him with divine forces at either end of a vertical plane which transects the sacred place of his parturition. Iamos has a double orientation toward antithetically placed divine powers because, as a prophet, he is to have a double source of mystical vision. I should like to describe the significant elements in the poet's narration because this ode, the *Sixth Olympian*, offers the clearest evidence for the ethnobotanical lore surrounding the paradigmatic birth of a hero and documents the probable etymology, at least in the viewpoint of an ancient poet, for a name like that of Iamos with the stem *iao-* or *io-*, which designates "poison" or "drug." Other similar names may have been understood at times to have had the same derivation. Iason, for example, was the mate of the herbalist and witch Medeia and he was raised by the same centaur who taught the young Asklepios the knowledge of drugs which made him a doctor or *iatros*. Iason's name is apparently a masculine version of Iaso, the goddess of healing. We cannot know, however, how universally a name's meaning would have been sensed except in those instances where a poet specifically directs attention to an etymology, whether scientifically correct or not.¹ In the *Ion*,

¹Sophokles, for example, seems to have punned upon an etymology for the name of Iole in his *Trachiniae*, associating her and Deianeira with a botanic form of *ios* which functions as a love charm that was nourished by an *aiolos* serpent and given birth by the *aiole* night: in their competition for the love of Herakles, both women are flowers, differing only in that Iole, who is younger, is the one to be picked, while Deianeira is the one to be crushed under foot (547-9); Deianeira, in fact, complains that her married life is like being plowed and harvested (32-3) and tells the chorus of maidens that they are meadows which have not felt the terrible heat of the sun which will cause their maidenhood to grow into the experience of maternity (141 ff.); Iole is a love charm (354 ff.), while Deianeira's charm, now that she is no longer young, is the untried potion which she was charmed into receiving from the centaur long ago (710); the pattern for the love embrace is established in the *parodos*, where the *aiole* night (94) and the sun engage in an eternal romance in which each of the lovers can come together only

Euripides offers an etymology for his hero's name from the participle of the verb *ienai*, *ion* or "going," but the entire naming episode in the play is a burlesque of misunderstandings and the poet seems to have structured the narrative of the tragedy to hint at a meaning which would be more appropriate to Ion's sacred nature, for the mystery of his identity derives from a birth which is similar to that of Iamos. The tragedy offers two variant, although analogous, versions of Ion's birth and presents a comedy of mistaken identities which culminates in an initiatory repetition of the birth trauma and the resultant mediation of the Apolline and Dionysian elements in his begetting.

* * *

The mother of Iamos was a certain Euadne, a "flower girl," as her name implies. She was a daughter of Poseidon and of a woman who was identical with an area of land along the Eurotas River in the Peloponnesos. The woman's name was Pitane and she had concealed her pregnancy until the time for her delivery and then had given the unwanted infant immediately away to a foster father. Euadne thus grew up in the court of this foster father, who was a son of Elatos, the "fir tree"; his name was Aipyros, an epithet which was descriptive of his extraordinary height. His kingdom bordered another river of the Peloponnesos and Euadne, like her mother Pitane, thus lived beside a river. In her turn, she, too, conceived a child whose birth she attempted to conceal. Euadne's father was the chthonic deity Poseidon; her own mate is the god Apollo, who is predominantly associated with the opposite realm. Her guardian Aipyros suspected that she was pregnant and accordingly travelled to Delphi to make inquiry of Apollo. While he is there conferring with the divine father, Euadne brings her son to birth.

The act is a "labor of love" (*ὑπ' ὠδινός τ' ἐπαράς* 43). Euadne's travail seems to repeat the ecstasy of the child's conception. She has removed her woven crimson waist band and laid aside the silver pitcher with which she apparently has been drawing water from the river; the child slips effortlessly out of the womb into the light of life. The goddess of swift travail and the guardians of Destiny attend her upon Apollo's

at the moment of the other's annihilation; after Deianeira sends her love charm to Herakles, the night's *ios* which the *aiolos* serpent nourished clings fatally to Herakles' annoyed sides (831-4); the play ends with Iole's transfer from the dying Herakles to his son because only a son can lie beside the father's woman, an idea which had been introduced by Hyllos' having just lain beside his dead mother. The pattern of the sacred marriage, which was enacted in maenadic rituals, underlies the nature of Herakles' love affairs with the two women and, as I shall attempt to explain in this essay, would have been readily recognized by the poet's audience at the Dionysian drama festival. This essay, however, will limit itself to the female's marriage and the procreation of her divine child. The male's mad ecstasy, as in the *Trachiniai*, is a related pattern, which I have described in another essay, entitled "Maiden and Mother: On the Choral Persona of the *Trachiniai* of Sophokles."

command. Like her own mother, however, she, too, deserts her baby, leaving him lying on the bare ground. The place is a briary thicket and the infant lies there "hidden" (54) as if for a second gestation like the fetus of the two "concealed" (31, 36) pregnancies while Apollo announces to Aipytos at Delphi that the child is to be a prophet. For five days he remains there, surrounded by rushes and an impenetrable thicket of briars; his body is drenched in the reflected radiance of "violets" or *ia*, a profusion of flowers which span the color spectrum from red to all the shades of purple (ἱὼν ξανθαῖσι καὶ παμπορφύροις ἀκτῖσι βεβρεγμένος ἄβρὸν σῶμα 55-6). His flowery mother Euadne had been described, herself, earlier as "violet-tressed," *ioplokos* (30), and apparently the sight of the infant amidst the *ion* flowers suggests to her the child's "immortal name," Iamos (56-7).

This scene with the infant drenched in the magical colors is described twice in the ode, on either side of the consultation at Delphi, which is the narrative event which occupies the central position in the ode's system of concentrically arranged themes.² I have just mentioned the naming episode, but actually the name of Iamos does not occur in this second treatment of the episode. The poet records it instead in the first treatment, where the parturition scene is detailed. The place for Euadne's travail is called a "bluish-purple lying-in" (λόχμας ὑπὸ κυανέας 40). It is obviously the same thicket of *ion* flowers. In that place, the abandoned child has received praeternatural nourishment in his mother's absence. By divine plan, two serpents have fed the infant, transferring poison or toxin (*ios*) from themselves to him, but a poison which is beneficial rather than harmful; it is with honey, the venom of bees, that they feed him. Such honey often was said to have nourished poets in their infancy as a sign of their future inspiration and it is perhaps also significant that the priestess of Apollo at Delphi could be called the "Bee." The ambivalent *ios* in the midst of the red-purple *ion* flowers is the sign of the child's divine role as a prophet; both are the etymology for his name. He is Iamos, the man of the *iama* or "drug," and apparently marked with a transubstantial existence with the *ion* flowers and the *ios* which they contain. In ancient herbal lore, serpents and medicinal or toxic plants acquired their drugs interchangeably from each other.³ The drug, furthermore, is the divine spirit which has become incarnate in the plant; and the miraculous child, therefore, also has within himself a portion of that same divinity. Iamos' father, as the Delphic priestess

²I discuss this ode's concentric design in my "Marginalia Pindarica II: The Poet's Grandmother," *Hermes* 96 (April, 1968) 132-42.

³Ver., *Aen.* 2.471: *coluber mala gramina pastus*. It was considered dangerous to pick mushrooms unless the serpent had begun its hibernation: cf. Plin., *H. N.* 95; Nic., *Alex.* 521 ff. The serpent's affinities to fungi and toxic plants are discussed in John Allegro's *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (Garden City, N.Y., 1970) 79-80.

announces in the middle of the naming episode, is Apollo, the god whose "arrows" (*ios*) dispense the poison of disease and who was the divine father of another miraculous child, the prototypic *iatros* Asklepios; Elatos, the "fir tree man," was Asklepios' mortal father and his mother was the "crow woman" Koronis. She seems to have been destroyed on a mountain in the midst of other women, while the fetus was still within her body: like Elatos, the group of women also was apparently somewhat arboreal and all of them were consumed by the fire which leapt from the single seed which had impregnated the mother (Pi., P 3.34-7). Asklepios, like Dionysos, was rescued by his divine father from the womb of his incinerated mother. Not only is the nature of Koronis' conception and death suggestive of the ecstatic experiences of Semele and her maenadic sisters, but one of Koronis' relatives also was associated with toxins and herbal lore. She was a sister of Ixion, who hallucinated that he was sleeping with Hera at a banquet with the gods and thereby fathered the whole race of centaurs (. . . *μαινόμεναις φρασὶν* 'Ἡρας ὅτ' ἐράσσατο. . . Pi., P. 2.25 ff.). His subsequent punishment on the whirling wheel could be interpreted as a destructive intoxication which was caused by his particular plant, *hippomanes* or "horse-mad," the psychotropic *Datura*.⁴ It was apparently this same plant which was responsible for Aias' similarly destructive madness in Sophokles' tragedy: Aias was presented onstage carrying a whip (hypoth. 9-10) which is identified as a "great horse-binding rein" (241-2) and he has been "harvesting" (239) in the "meadow of horse-mad" (143-4, cf. 233).

It seems improbable that the magical *ion* flowers which surround the Iamos child could have been simply the *Viola odorata* or violet. Their association with serpents in Pindar's account suggests instead some psychotropic plant and the *ion*, itself, may have been employed merely for the purpose of the pun which it afforded with *ios* and the etymological derivation of the name of Iamos. The repeated emphasis upon the plant's color, however, may be intended to hint at the identity of a particular psychotropic plant which could not be named openly without transgressing the taboo which reserved it for sacral purposes. The range of color from yellow to violet, which is a detail that Pindar insists upon, corresponds exactly to that of the *Amanitae* mushrooms, amongst which the tawny *muscaria* or fly agaric is both psychotropic and known to have been used for religious ceremonies.⁵ Other members of the same family

⁴Ixion is shown with the *Datura* on a bronze Etruscan mirror of the 3rd or 4th century, B.C., in the British Museum. The juxtaposition of Ixion, bound to his wheel, and the *Datura*, which is shaped analogously to the wheel, is probably meant to represent the hero as a shaman in mystical flight. The wheel and the horse are both indications of the shaman's means of transport; Ixion's association with the wheel as well as with the centaurs and the "horse-mad" plant is probably to be understood in such an ethnobotanical religious context.

⁵R. Gordon Wasson, *Soma, Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (New York 1972) 215.

of mushrooms are fatally toxic and the taboo against the profane use of the *muscaria* was intensified, in other cultures at least, by the intentional confusion of it with poisonous varieties. There is no evidence for such a taboo in ancient Greece although something of the kind might be involved in the obscurity about the actual nature of Iambe's jest at the Eleusinian initiation (Hom., *h. Cer.* 200-5): she seems to have revealed her hermaphroditism by displaying Iakchos growing in her womb (Orph., *Fr.* 52).⁶ That mushrooms, however, did figure in Greek ethno-

⁶It is, of course, extremely hazardous to base an argument on evidence *ex silentio*. In what I add here, I do not intend to imply that I have revealed the Mystery. I should like merely to offer some observations which seem relevant to what may have been involved in some way in certain aspects of the Eleusinian initiation, which, as is generally known, lay under an injunction of silence. It is the nature of religious or mystical experience to reconcile various of the dichotomies of human existence; the figure of Iambe seems to mediate the basic oppositions which form the structure of the myths about Demeter and Kore. The rape of the daughter by a male destroys the maiden and separates her from the mother, while the eternal return from death reunites mother and daughter and involves the birth of a male child; in a metaphysical context of a love enacted between two realms, the maiden's death in her maiden state is the rite of passage to her rebirth in motherhood. Iambe's jest seems to be a pivotal point within this system as the maiden converts to mother and the mother, with the false name of *Doso*, the "Giver," changes into the crone, the nurse of another woman's child. Iambe was also called Baubo and she is represented in fifth-century figurines as a "belly girl," a dwarf with her face in her stomach, as would be appropriate to the etymology of her name from "entrails." Another possible connotation for her name, however, associates her with the *baubon* or "dildo." As womb and phallos together, Iambe was hermaphroditic (cf. Marie Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite* [London 1961; French edition, 1956] 31); the Baubo figurines, in fact, could be interpreted as phalloi which have been decorated as females by the addition of a face and genitalia beneath the glans. In her, therefore, the opposition of male and female are mediated. A further mediation equates the male lover and the procreated male child, the destroyer and the savior, for *bauban* means to "sleep" and it was some kind of sleep in the form of the *narkissos* plant which united Persephone with Hades. Iambe's revelation of the little Iakchos in her womb nullifies the maiden's antagonism toward the lover who has destroyed her maiden identity by converting him into the male child who redeems her from Hades by his own conception. As this essay will attempt to show, both the child and the lover exist on an ethnobotanical level as ritualized attitudes in the gathering of sacred plants by ecstatic women enacting the sacred marriage. Iakchos and Iambe, therefore, may mask further puns upon the *iao-* root.

That some form of psychotropic intoxication was induced during the mystery initiation is now generally admitted (C. Kerenyi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* [New York 1967; German edition, 1962] 177-80), although the identification of *blechon* with *Mentha Pulegium* can not be taken as certain in view of the Eleusinian religion's great antiquity and the tendency for plants to change their names in the course of time. *Blechon*, in any case, had aphrodisiac connotations in the fifth century (cf. *blechon* as an aphrodisiac potion: Ar., *Pax* 709-12; and *blechon* as female public hair: Ar., *Lys.* 87-9); it is, however, possible that these psychotropic qualities existed only symbolically because of the sexuality involved in the myths of the two goddesses. The profanation of the mysteries during the fifth century in several private homes might suggest that

botany is proven by a myth about the foundation of Mycenae: Perseus is said to have quenched his thirst at a spring which flowed from a mushroom which he picked at the site of the future city, which was supposedly named after the plant or *mykes* (Paus. 2.16.3). The fifth-century tragedian Aristias seems to have used that tradition in his *Perseus* play (Nauck, *TGF* p. 727). The Gorgon episode of the Perseus myth also could apparently be interpreted in terms of mushroom lore: a fourth-century Italian vase painting shows Perseus decapitating the Medousa at a fruit-laden tree with which she, and in particular her head, is associated; the fruit of the tree is equated with a mushroom, as is indicated by the mushrooms which the artist placed as annotations above Perseus' head.⁷ The foundation myth of another city also seems to have involved fungi, for at Corinth the primal autochthonous inhabitants, according to the eighth-century epic poet Eumelos, were men whom Sisyphos had created out of mushrooms (*ap.* Paus. 2.3.8). Euripides may have recalled the tradition in his *Medeia* (1380-1). Such myths about the primal peoples, like that of Kadmos who sowed the serpent's teeth at Thebes, attempt to reconcile the dichotomy between supernal or foreign origin and the chthonic origin of the earlier peoples who grew like plants from the earth itself. Along with the psychological and historical determinants which seem to have been operative in the creation of the heroic paradigm must also be recognized certain aspects of botanical symbolism in details such as the single-footed stance of figures like Iason and Oidipous, who leave the mountainous locales of their childhood, overcoming their plant-like attachment to place in order to wander and return from abroad. That some Greek mushrooms were indeed recognized for their psychotropic properties can, furthermore, be attested from the fourth-century comedian Antiphanes, who expected his audience to know that a particular mushroom which is associated with the oak tree would presumably induce clairvoyance (Edmonds, *FAC* 227). In addition to the color of the scene for Iamos' parturition, the recurrent emphasis upon the fir tree in the names of Elatos and Aipyros also suggests that it may have been the *muscaria* that was the botanic analogue for the magical infant since the *Amanitae* grow only in mycorrhizal dependence upon the root structures of the birch, fir, and pine trees, which accordingly have figured in the symbolism of the herbalist procedures for finding and

some aspect of the religious experience could be perverted for a social entertainment; such a perversion is appropriate to the profane use of some sacred intoxicant. I doubt, however, that the tabooed item was actually *blechn*; more probably, the taboo hid the identity of whatever was referred to as the *narkissos*.

⁷The vase is catalogued as no. 335 in A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania, and Sicily* (Oxford 1967). The author describes the vase simply as "Perseus and the three Gorgons beneath a fruit tree" and makes no note of the two mushrooms. There are, however, four women and not three beneath the tree, although one of them has lost her head, and the mushrooms are unmistakable, even to the indications of grass growing at the bases of their stipes.

gathering the plants and for achieving alteration of consciousness. Despite these suggestions, however, a conclusive identification of Iamos' *ion* is not possible, especially since magical attributes in herbal lore tend to be displaced to plants which in actuality do not possess them but were in some way associated with the original.

Euadne's divine conception and parturition of Iamos has as its prototype herbalist procedures which can be documented from Greek art and literature. Plant-gathering rituals which apparently induced some kind of visionary experience are depicted on signet rings from the Mycenaean-Minoan period. One from grave circle A at Mycenae, which is now in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens (Inv. Nr. 992), shows women who are presenting flowers to a woman seated beneath a tree, while the apparition of a male in a body shield hovers in the sky as the seventh item in a sequence of six ascending bucrania. Another from Isopata, which is now in the Herakleion Museum, depicts women in a flowering place with the apparition of a goddess in the sky, to whom has been added the annotation of a single eye. These rituals provide referents for myths like that of Persephone, who met her lover from Hades when she picked the *narkissos* flower (Hom., *h. Cer.*). The flower was apparently some psychotropic plant whose name, according to Plutarch, was supposedly derived from *narke* or "numbness" (2.647b). Eurydike, also, was taken to Hades when she was bitten by a serpent as she picked flowers. According to Euripides, Helen, too, was picking flowers when she was transported through the air to a tomb in Egypt (*Hel.* 240-51), which is the land from which she was supposed to have derived her great knowledge of drugs (Hom., *Od.* 4.221 ff.). That such confrontations with a spiritual lover do indeed occur in a context of ritual plant-gathering is verified by the rationalized version of the myth of the rape of Oreithyia which Plato presents in the *Phaidros* (229c ff.): instead of being raped by Boreas, she was merely playing with her friend Pharmakeia or the "use of drugs" when she fell off the mountain, pushed by a gust of wind.

It is probable that maenadic rites involved such gathering of plants, which were used as psychotropic additives to the sacred wine, for ancient wine customarily had its intoxicating properties intensified by the addition of herbal toxins.⁸ This fact is generally acknowledged by students of ancient technology, but its implications for Dionysian symbolism, which must accordingly involve more than the vine, have not been noted. The art of distillation was unknown before late Hellenistic antiquity and ancient Greek wine, which inevitably tasted of pitch from the containers in which it was stored (Ar., *Ach.* 190), never attained an alcoholic content beyond that produced by simple fermentation. The Greeks,

⁸On the nature of Greek wine and the rituals of plant gathering, I am summarizing here material from a work in progress in which I study the Dionysian drama festivals and the ethnobotanical symbolism of the god Dionysos.

nevertheless, customarily drank their wine diluted with three or four parts water. The potency of such diluted wine, on the evidence of the comedian Euboulos, was strong enough to induce a severe intoxication after only four cups and a complete derangement after ten (Edmonds, *FAC* 19). The drinking of undiluted wine was thought to induce permanent insanity (Hdt. 6.755-84; Ath. 10.436) or death (Ath. 10.437); and some wines were so strong that they could not be drunk safely without dilution with so much as eight parts water (Plin., *H. N.* 14.53). Not only does the absence of techniques for distillation make it impossible that the intoxicant in such potent wines could have been alcohol alone, but evidence can be found to document the fact that different ancient wines could induce diametrically opposed alterations in consciousness (Thphr., *HP* 9.18.10; Ath. 1.31; Plin., *H. N.* 14.117; Ael., *VH* 13.6). The *thyrsos* which maenadic women carried indicates that they were probably engaged in the activity of gathering plants in which the god Dionysos was thought to be immanent. Plant-gatherers used to stuff their herbs into reeds and fennel-like stalks in order to preserve their freshness (Thphr., *HP* 9.16.2); the *thyrsos* was such a stalk into which ivy leaves have been stuffed and ivy was recognized in antiquity for its psychotropic properties (Dsc., *Alex.* 2.179; cf. Plin., *H. N.* 24.75). That there were indeed elaborate rituals for gathering magical plants in ancient Greece can be documented (Thphr., *HP* 9.8.6; cf. Plin., *H. N.* 25.29; Ael., *VH* 9.32) and, although our literary sources would ordinarily have had little cause for recording these folk traditions, Sophokles must have incorporated some authentic details of herbal lore in his lost *Root-Diggers* or *Rhizotomoi* tragedy, in which the chorus was apparently composed of herbalist witches. The female's religious associations with earth in Greek culture would suggest that the plant which grew from the ground would in some way be fantasized as her child as well as the child of earth. The transition of the plant-child to the role of plant as lover would, moreover, be inevitable since the ingested toxin would induce the ecstasy which was interpreted, through sexual metaphors, as communion with the deity. We may get some pictorial confirmation for these assumptions from a fourth-century red-figured pelike in the British Museum.⁹ It depicts a woman who holds a rectangular box from which she sprinkles flour or seeds of some kind above a garden of phallos to recompense the earth for what she is presumably about to harvest. On the opposite side of the vase, a young male and female approach each other in what may be an impersonation of the sacred marriage. A more explicit example of the sexual magic employed in the harvesting of a particular miraculous herb in the Hellenistic period is recorded in Josephus, who claims that menses and female urine were used to entice the plant into standing still while being cut (*BJ* 7.181).¹⁰

⁹440-400 B. C. British Museum, Catalogue of Vases III 387 no. E 819.

¹⁰For further examples of sexual mimesis in ancient plant gathering, cf. Allegro, *op. cit.*, chap. 9, "The Sacred Prostitute," 76-82.

The numerous depictions of maenads engaged in tending the infant Dionysos, whom they have found amidst plants on the ground, or in fending off the lascivious advances of the adult god's ithyphallic satyrs are probably to be understood as illustrations of the type of fantasies which were involved in Dionysian herbalist procedures. It was in the Nysian plain, for example, that Persephone had been picking flowers when she met her lover Hades (Hom., *h. Cer.* 17). One probable etymology for the name of Dionysos is that he is the "Zeus of Nysa" and, on the testimony of Herakleitos, Hades could be equated with Dionysos specifically as a god responsible for the maenadic ecstasy (Diels, *Vorsokr. Fr.* 15). Nysa, itself, suggests an etymological connection with the verb *nustazo*, "to doze or sleep," and would, therefore, be an appropriate place for the *narkissos* to be found. The name of Nysa seems to have been generic for the mountainous places which were sacred to Dionysos and the maenads' ecstatic rituals. Dionysos, himself, was born in a Nysa (Hdt. 2.146). After his birth, the infant was tended by his maenads, whose names give us some clue to the successive roles which they seem to have impersonated with regard to the intoxicant and its preparation. As the title of a lost tragedy of Aischylos indicates, they might play the role of his nurses (hypoth. in *E. Med.*), tending for the child whom another had born so that the plant's anger for being picked would not find them for its recipient. Amongst the names for these nurses can be found a Nysa (Terp. *Fr.* 8) and a "crow woman," Korone (D. S. 5.52.2). The latter name perhaps implies the dancing which the maenads performed in imitation of birds, as depicted on vase paintings; birds were often associated with magical plants as materializations of their guardian spirits (Thphr., *HP* 9.8.6; Plin., *H. N.* 25.29; Ael., *VH* 9.32). Apparently, after the correct preparation of the intoxicant, the maenads ate their own children (Plu., *Moralia* 38; Ael., *VH* 3.42; Apollod. 3.4.3, 3.5.2, 2.2.2; Nonn. 47.484 ff., 48.917 ff., 9.49 ff.). The same nurses who had raised the Dionysos of Nysa then became members of his ecstatic band of bacchantes as his brides (*h. Hom.* 26), in which role they were often identified. Maenads could have "horse names" like Leukippe, who was one of the maenads who ate her son at Orchomenos (Plu., *Moralia* 38); the horse connotes both sexuality and transport and it was as equine satyrs that the god most frequently seems to have materialized to his devotees. The women thus were apparently both quasi mothers and brides of the same male deity. An Attic black-figured vase depicts the infant Dionysos being given to Ariadne.¹¹ In myth, she was his bride and, according to the legend of her Cyprian cult, she was said to have died in childbirth (Plu., *Thes.* 20.3) and, like another Persephone, she was his queen in Hades (Hom., *Od.* 11.325).

The exact herbalist procedures no doubt varied from place to place and from time to time. It is not possible to be exact about activities

¹¹Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, cat. no. 48. 11.

which were largely secret and which are represented in literature only in mythologized form, but the central importance which these Dionysian rituals occupied in Greek society should suggest to us that herbalist patterns and metaphors in literature would have been readily comprehended. The details of Euadne's clothing and utensils, for example, as well as her abandonment of the child and return after an interval of days may constitute specific reference to a ritual act. It is, furthermore, not possible to identify the Dionysian intoxicant with any certainty. It too, no doubt, varied and may always have been a compound of different toxins. That opium was sometimes associated with the god, probably in Eleusinian contexts, is suggested by a red-figure vase from southern Italy which depicts Dionysos amongst his maenads as a mature young man, apparently the son of Persephone by Hades; he wears a crown of poppy capsules on his head.¹² Mycological lore also is relevant to certain attributes of the deity. Like the mushroom which was thought to be engendered by lightning (Ath. 2.62b; Plin., *H. N.* 22.100), Dionysos was conceived when the bolt of Zeus struck the Theban Semele. The "thunderbolt" or *keraunion* was the name of a particular mushroom (Thphr., *HP* 1.6.5). Hyginus records an interesting variant for the god's birth in which Semele conceived him by drinking a potion which contained her son's heart and thus had ingested the son who converted into the role of lover in order to beget himself (*F.* 167); such a paradox is explicable in terms of the intoxicant's dual role toward his mother and his bride. The mushroom, furthermore, had phallic connotations, for *mykes* was a metaphor for the penis (Archil., *Fr.* 34 Diehl). It also connoted the chthonic world of Hades, as is shown by the numerous stone grave monuments which are of fungoid, rather than phalloid, shape.¹³ A punning on *mykes* and *mykema*, the "bellowing call of bulls," furthermore, united the deity's botanic and taurine manifestations, as in the Mycenaean meadow of "bellowing mushrooms" in a fragment of Aristias (Nauck, *TGF* p. 727; cf. E., *Bac.*, 689 ff.; A., *Fr.* 57).

Both Pitane and Euadne experienced their romances on the banks of rivers. Oreithyia's caprice with Pharmakeia took place along the Ilisos. The maenadic connotations of such locales can be sensed in Sophokles' description of Deianeira's courtship in the *Trachiniai*. She is a daughter of a "wine man," Oineus (6), and she was wooed by the river Acheloios, who manifested himself to her as a bull, a serpent, and a man with horns. When Herakles arrived to save her, he leapt into the river, but the moment of combat is conveyed as a confusing medley of a river and a

¹²A. D. Trendall, *Frühitaliotische vasen*, pl. 24.

¹³Donna Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London 1971) 242-4: "It would be easier to accept these as phalloi if any one of them bore the slightest resemblance to the organ with which Greek artists were well familiar. The asymmetry of the glans, and the duct and the testicles are never shown, and the knob is often flat, hemispherical or spherical. The only group of objects which all these "phalloi" can be said to resemble is fungi."

bestial Herakles (497 ff.) so that Deianeira, who could not bring herself even to witness the event, has remained ambivalent about her husband's role as her savior or her destroyer (26-7). While crossing another river on what was apparently her bridal journey (563), she was attacked by a centaur, from whom she was again rescued by Herakles; but the dying centaur managed to convey the poison from Herakles' arrow to Deianeira in the form of a love potion composed of his own poisoned blood. When Deianeira uses that untried philtre to attempt to charm Herakles' love back from Iole, she discovers that she and Iole are flowers of different sorts (547-9) and that the potion reveals its true nature like the foaming juice of the Bacchic vine (701-4).

In Pindar's narrative about Iamos, the river is the means whereby the son is reunited with his divine paternity. The vegetative nature of Iamos continues in the poet's description of the child's growing to manhood: "he seized the harvest of that delightful and golden-wreathed goddess who is Youth" (6.57-8). He walks into the river and in mid-stream calls upon Poseidon, his divine grandfather, and upon Apollo, his father, asking for his birthright and inheritance. At night, beneath the open sky, a voice answers him, commanding him to rise and follow. The voice is Apollo's inspiration and Iamos journeys with it toward the future, when he will receive a second voice, which will be that of Zeus, once the hero Herakles will have founded the Olympian sanctuary, where the descendants of Iamos will function perpetually as prophets. That journey toward the future balances the journey which Pindar, himself, had taken earlier in the ode toward the past in order to uncover the origin of his patron's prophetic ability; he had found it in the birth and inspiration of Iamos and that discovery, in turn, inspires Pindar, too, to journey toward the future with his patron. Hagesias, as the troop of dancers makes its way toward a distant celebration across the water in a new land, where he now resides. There they will sing of Persephone, who was carried away by the white horses of her lover from Hades, and of the mother Demeter, whose feet are colored crimson-purple, and of Zeus, who has subdued the chthonic forces of the Aetnean volcano. The theme of the mythical prophet Amphiaraus, who earlier in the ode had been swallowed beneath the earth at Thebes with his horses, is repeated in this final rearrangement of the maiden-mother mystery into an Olympian or redemptive configuration.



The child of a parental couple is actually two children, the mother's child and the father's child. Ion, in Euripides' tragedy, endures a delightfully confusing series of recognitions as he comes to learn of his parentage. The intrigue involves his twice rejecting the mortal contenders for parenthood, for he mistakes his would-be father for a lecherous pederast (517 ff.) and his mother for a murderer (1395 ff.). Each time, moreover, that he accepts a parent, the question of the other member of the

couple leaves him open to the possibility of bastardy, with lowly rather than divine lineage.

Kreoussa, the Athenian "queen," and her foreigner husband Xouthos have gone to Delphi to consult the oracle about the sterility of their royal union. Actually, each of them has had a child and Ion, the temple servant, will be recognized by each of them separately as a son of an illicit union. Two versions of Ion's birth are elaborated in the play. In one version, Kreoussa conceived a child by Apollo at Athens. She was gathering flowers, like so many similar women, when she found her lover; she was picking gold-reflecting *krokos* flowers¹⁴ into the fold of her gown when the god revealed himself to her with his golden hair glistening in the light (887 ff.). The place was named the "Great Rocks," a cave on the north slope of the Acropolis. It was involved in some way with something which is called the "Pythian lightning bolts" (*ἀστραπαὶ τε Πυθίαι* 285) and with Apollo as the slayer of the Python serpent. It seems to have been a place for the enactment of certain maenadic rites. Pan played his pipes there to accompany the dancing of a group of women called the "Society of Aglaurai" (492 ff.; cf. 936 ff.). The Aglaurai were the original daughters of the autochthonous king of Athens, Kekrops. Athene had entrusted her serpent child, Erichthonios, to them and they went into a fatal, mad ecstasy when they opened the basket in which he had been concealed (21, 268 ff.). The autochthonous birth of Erichthonios, in fact, is cited as the precedent and model for the birth of Ion (20-1); and Kreoussa is a granddaughter of Erichthonios. Her father Erectheus had died in this same cave. He used to slaughter his own virgin daughters on behalf of Earth, and Kreoussa alone had been spared since she was only an infant when Erectheus descended into the chasm which opened when Poseidon, in his contention with Athene for the possession of Attica, struck the ground with his trident; the spring which resulted was located in the cave of the Great Rocks (277 ff.). When Kreoussa's son was born, she had imitated the action of Athene with the serpentine Erichthonios. She exposed Ion in a "circular basket chest" (19; cf. 36), as was the custom in her family, placing two golden serpents as ornaments upon the infant. The place for this exposure of the infant is the same cave in which he had been conceived (17) and, according to Kreoussa, it was in that place that he had also been brought to birth (949; cf. 16); that parturition occurred in the same cave as the picking of the flowers for the child's conception suggests a botanic pattern in the mystery of the birth. The basket in which Ion was exposed is seen at the end of the play, when it serves as the symbolic token, confirming the identity of Ion as Kreoussa's child: the proofs are a sample of Kreoussa's weaving which depicts the Gorgon head with a border of serpents in the manner of an aegis, the gold serpents

¹⁴The color of the plant is no doubt the significant element; oil of *krokos*, however, had soporific properties: Dsc. 1.64.

of the Erichthonian rite, and a wreath of eternal olive, which was Athene's pledge to Athens in her contest with Poseidon (1419 ff.). When Ion at last is recognized, Erectheus will have been reborn in him (ἀνθρᾶ δ' Ἐρεχθεύς 1465). Thus, Apollo, who slew the serpent, will have begot a child who renews the serpent's lineage. It is perhaps even suggested, by means of a pun on the poison, *ios*, and the participle of the verb "to be," *ōn*, which resembles the participle *iōn*, that Ion had connotations which associated him with toxins and serpents (δρακόντων ἰδς ὦν τῶν Γοργόνης 1015).¹⁵ Such an etymology for Ion would be appropriate for the figure to whom, as Nicander recorded, certain "Ionian brides" presented *ion* flowers (*ap.* Ath. 15.681d, 683a). Athene's Erichthonios, however, had destroyed his foster mothers; Ion had been entrusted to the foster motherhood of the Delphic priestess, the Pythoness, whose prophetic ecstasy is controlled by ritual. She will assign him to his would-be father, Xouthos.

It is this false father who names Ion via a trivial etymology which is repeated several times in the play (534 ff., 661 ff., 802, 831). He is *iōn* or "going," the first person whom Xouthos meets as he "goes" out of the temple of Apollo. Xouthos is a foreigner at Athens compared to the autochthonous descent of Kreoussa. His name designates him as the "tawny-yellow" man, a color like Xanthos, the epithet of Apollo, and like the "saffron" *krokoi* which Kreoussa had been gathering when she encountered her yellow lover. The chthonic element predominates in Xouthos' background. He is, himself, a son of the serpentine north wind, Aiolos; the Delphic python was a representative of that wind and Xouthos seems to be not only mortal instead of divine but also an antithetical figure to Apollo. As a lover, he would suggest the opposite configuration to the elements which predominate in Apollo. These chthonic or, perhaps, even Dionysian connotations of Xouthos will be redeemed through substitution and rearrangement in the course of the tragedy. When Xouthos arrives for the first time onstage, he is probably impersonated by the same actor who had delivered the prologue as Hermes. Such doubling of roles would have been noticed by the audience since, as we know, prizes were awarded to actors in the festival competition; and since the poet served as his own director, doubled roles probably indicate something about his structural concepts in composing his drama.¹⁶ Xouthos, therefore, is a former Hermes, an idea which de-

¹⁵A. S. Owen, *Euripides' Ion* (Oxford 1939) ix, n. 2.

¹⁶Whether or not the sequence of roles which an actor impersonated for each play had any significance, either consciously or in some subliminal manner, is a much vexed subject. In a forth-coming essay in *Arethusa* ("Duality and the Madness of Herakles"), I have attempted to demonstrate that the doubling of the Lykos and Herakles roles has thematic significance in that the two figures are related as antithetical versions of the same metaphorical structures. A similarly significant doubling occurs in Sophokles' *Trachiniai*, where the Deianeira actor also plays Herakles; by structural design, the two lovers can meet only at the

velops the essentially chthonic significance of his stage configuration. Xouthos, at the opening of the play, had been away consulting the Trophonios oracle (300, 393, 405) in his native Boeotia, a ritual which involved actual descent and lengthy incubation in a cavern. When he returns for his entrance in the play, he asks Kreoussa whether his long absence had made her suspect that he had died; her fear hadn't gone to that extent, she claims, but she had been a little concerned (403-4). From the subterranean oracle, Xouthos thus passes into the temple of the oracular priestess of Apollo and receives the omen whereby he will falsely recognize his son in the temple boy, Ion, who, of course, must have had some other name before Xouthos names him "Going." Xouthos thinks Ion must be the child whom he had conceived once upon Mount Parnassos at Delphi during a night-time, torch-lit Bacchic festival, when he had got drunk and had an affair with a maenad (550 ff.; cf. 676 ff.). This mountain is thematically similar to the place at Athens where Ion was conceived: it was the site of the cave where Apollo slew the serpent and of the Bacchanalia which occurred during the absence of Apollo in the realm of the Hyperboreans, which was thought to lie beyond the north wind. This northern realm perhaps would commonly have connoted also movement along a vertical plane toward the stable polar star, which marks the northern direction; Boreas blew both from the topographical north and downward into Hades and, therefore, he was, for example, an appropriate mate for Oreithyia as she engaged in her activities with Pharmakeia.¹⁷ In Xouthos' maenadic version of Ion's birth, the child is the same as in the other: he is a child of Earth (542), the "son of a son of Zeus" (Διὸς παιδὸς γενέσθαι παῖς 559), a formula which could describe him either as Apollo's or Dionysos' son. The chthonic and Dionysian elements in his conception both at Delphi and at Athens will be redeemed through the rejection of his false claimant to paternity in favor of Apollo and through the tragedy's burlesque treatment of serious themes.

When Xouthos recognizes his supposed son by the maenad, he celebrates the event with a drunken banquet, one which, in fact, is meant to induce a drunken intoxication (ὥς θᾶσσον ἔλθωσ' οἷδ' ἐς ἡδονὰς φρενῶν 1180). He goes off to the same mountain where he believes that he

moment when one destroys the other, an idea which is stated as a metaphysical pattern in the *parodos* (94 ff.). On the doubled role in the *Trachiniai*, cf. M. McCall, "The *Trachiniai*: Structure, Focus, and Herakles," *AJP* 93 (1972) 142-63. The doubling of the roles of Hermes and Xouthos in the *Ion* is, of course, a more subtle example and perhaps indicates more about the author's structural conception of his drama than about audience response.

¹⁷Cf. A. E. S. Butterworth, *The Tree at the Navel of the Earth* (Berlin 1970) 29. Boreas carries Odysseus to the underworld since it blows from directly overhead. The role of Boreas as the lover of Oreithyia and Pharmakeia is also interesting in view of the horse symbolism involved in the maenad's rituals: Boreas was thought to be able to fertilize horses (Hom., *Il.* 20.221; cf. Verg., *Georg.* 3.274-5).

begot his son, intending to slaughter a bull on the Dionysian peak of Parnassos (1125-8). Meanwhile, he leaves his son nearby to supervise the entertainment in a tent. The elaborate scenes which are depicted in the tapestries which form the tent place Ion in an enclosure of symbolic heraldry, like the sample of Kreoussa's weaving with which the mother had covered him as an infant when she had exposed him as a prey for birds. Kreoussa's heraldic ensignia, however, had been clearly chthonic; in the tent, Ion is surrounded by depictions of the constellations and the heavenly bodies: only at the entrance is there a portrayal of the serpent Kekrops with his Aglaurai daughters. The tapestries are all part of the spoils which Herakles had won from the hostile females who were called Amazons. In this tent, Ion is obviously about to experience some sort of initiatory transition which will move him from his chthonic, earth-born origins to a status in which the supernal connotations will predominate. The parodos ode had offered a similar symbolic enclosure for Apollo in the description of the Delphic temple which housed the god and his inspired priestess: the chorus of women tourists from Athens had described the scene with Herakles and Iolaos in their battle against the hydra, a design which the women, no doubt significantly, claim to have converted into a tapestry back home; they then described the anti-chthonic role which Pallas Athene is seen playing in her battle with the Earth-born Giants; and finally, they passed on to the description of the chthonic thunderer, who is Bromios or Bakchos, the son of Earth (184 ff.).

The revel which Xouthos has planned is abruptly changed into an intoxication of another sort by the arrival of the poison which Kreoussa sends via the old man who had been the *paidagogos* or "child leader" of Kreoussa's father Erechtheus (725-6). Kreoussa does not know that Ion is her son and she believes that she is destroying Xouthos' son. The poison with which she attempts to kill him has an interesting provenance. The Gorgon was a child of Earth and was Earth's ally in the battle of her creatures against the heavenly gods; Athene killed it, wearing the aegis, which was her thorax armor composed of vipers. Pallas gave that aegis to Erichthonios, her own first-born son to come out of earth; and with that aegis, she gave two single drops of Gorgon blood in separate containers. Each of the drops is of a different effect; one is deadly, while the other is a drug which acts as a panacea. Kreoussa has inherited these drops of antithetical toxins from her father and she wears them on her arm as part of her stage costume. It is clear that she is a stage figure who is constructed upon the pattern of the maenad's ambivalent encounter with the ecstasy induced by her botanic child and lover. Like the infant whom the maenad picks, she, too, is often represented in transubstantial existence with the toxin. Thus, for example, Deianeira in Sophokles' *Trachiniai* leads her chorus of maidens into the terrible mysteries of maternity by testing the centaur's poison, which she hopes will make Herakles again into her lover but which in-

stead causes his death. In the murder plot of the *Ion*, Kreoussa chooses to reveal her terrible potential and plans to poison her son's wine (985 ff.; cf. 1478 ff.). Kreoussa's symbolic stage configuration, moreover, is similar to that of the heraldic tokens in the basket, through which she will convert into her more beneficial aspect. The chorus invokes Persephone-Hekate to send the poison to its destination (1048 ff.), but, as it turns out, Ion does not die. A *komos* or revel band of pigeons (*κῶμος πελειῶν* 1197) will intervene to drink the poisoned wine and die in a Bacchic fit (*κάβάκευσε* 1204), thereby saving Ion, who originally was to have been a prey for birds when he was exposed to die as an infant (1494-6; cf. 504-5). This redemptive role for the birds is a serious treatment of the burlesque elements in Ion's earlier monody, which he had sung as he swept the steps of Apollo's temple, shooing the birds away from the sanctuary so that they would not leave their droppings there at Delphi (162 ff.). The birds in that song were described as rather grotesquely large: an eagle (158) and a swan (162); and the language suggests that the scene was staged with an extra chorus of bird dancers (*τίς ἔδ'* . . . 170 ff.), one of whom apparently enters with a bundle of faggots, intending to build its nest on the temple. Ion could not, however, kill the birds since birds are omens and he could merely shoo them off to other sanctuaries.

The two versions of the birth of Ion, the child of Kreoussa and the child of Xouthos, which are both Dionysian versions of an Apolline begetting, merge in the mystery of the sixth night of the Eleusinian initiation. After sending the Gorgon drops in the custody of Hekate to Ion, who is the outsider hoping to usurp the autochthonous kingship of the Erechtheids, the chorus describes the dancing ground in front of the Kallichoros well at Eleusis, where Demeter had mourned for the loss of Kore, who had been abducted by Hades. There, on the night of the twentieth of Boedromion, the month which was named after the aid which Ion would one day afford the Athenians in the war against the Eleusinians, the stars and the moon and the fifty daughters of Nereus seem to take part in the dance which honors the Eleusinian duo of maiden and mother. It is a sacred moment, when Kore's son, Iakchos, the god of many names, whose special day that twentieth was, watches the night-long revel. It seems inconceivable to the choral women that the "Apolline wanderer" (*ὁ Φοῖβειος ἀλάτας* 1089), who is the child "Going" or Ion, should intrude himself there at that sacred moment as "king," the Athenian official who conducted the mystery. In antistrophic choreography, the chorus demands a palinode (*παλίμφομος αἰοιδά* 1096), a recantation for the songs which tell of their nights of illicit love, such as those apparently at which Kreoussa conceived her lost, unknown child. Those slanders, "going with the Muse" (*κατὰ μούσαν ἰόντες* 1091), reproach women for their love affairs although women's "tillage" is more holy than men's (*εὐσεβία κρατοῦμεν ἄδικον ἄροτον ἀνδρῶν* 1095-6). Just as it had been the poison which the women had sent at the

ode's beginning to fill the *krater* or mixing bowl with death, now it is the slander which goes its way toward the men's party. "Let it go!" the chorus cries (*ἴτω* 1097), for Xouthos has begot an illicit son of his own. Xouthos is called the son of Zeus (*ὁ Διὸς* 1099) since he is the god's grandson, but the term describes both Apollo and Dionysos more closely. The poison and the going songs about the maenad's sacred marriages thus go to Going, the Apolline wanderer who intrudes at Eleusis, although, once he is correctly recognized, he will be seen to be appropriate there not only as an Erechtheid but also, like another Iakchos, a kore's son, the product of her love affair with earth's tillage.

When it is all over, Athene enters to confirm the birth of Ion, thus mediating between the two versions of who he is. Her appearance is appropriate since Ion is a child like her own Erichthonios; the chorus had invited her in the first stasimon to come together with Artemis, her sister in perpetual maidenhood. They both had been invoked to allow Kreousa and Xouthos to have a son (452 ff.). Both Athene and Artemis were said to have functioned as midwives for the parturition of their brother Apollo from Leto. In Ion, who is the ambivalent toxin from the Dionysian earth transformed into celestial status as Apollo's son, the two generic identities for the maenad's divine son and lover in the sacred marriage are united. Like another Iakchos, Ion redeems the kore's loss of her maiden self in the transition to motherhood by converting the chthonic lover into the triumphant son whom she conceived in Hades by her celestial mate. Kreoussa with Apollo and Xouthos with the maenad have all contributed to produce the son who mediates the antitheses of autochthonous and alien origins, chthonic and supernal parentage.

"Why," as Ion asks, "did Apollo give his own son to another man and say I was born by Xouthos?" (1532-3). The answer simplifies the mystery: a friend might give his own son to a friend so that he could be the inheritor and master of a house (1534-5). Ion, who is the foster son of a foreign male and the autochthonous child returning from orphanage in another land, will eventually, through the four sons from his "root," be the ancestor of the Ionian peoples of the islands and Asia (74, 1571 ff.).

* * *

Mythology always suggests a multiplicity of determinants and no one system can ever be expected to deplete its meanings. In drawing together certain ethnobotanical elements, I do not intend to imply that this was the sole significance of these two works of art. It is probable, however, that the poets and their audiences would have recognized levels of meaning in the figures of Iamos and Ion which for us are only dimly perceived because we lack personal experience of the plant-gathering rituals and their role in the complex of Eleusinian, Dionysian, and Apolline religions. Without attempting to explain what goes beyond our available evidence, I should like to summarize what seems to me to be incontestable in the two works which I have discussed.

The naming of Iamos is a theme of central importance in Pindar's poem and is emphasized by the symmetrical design of the composition. The etymology of his name is clearly based on the details of the birth scene, which involves the beneficial *ios* toxin of serpent/bees and an extraordinary profusion of *ion* flowers which have a broad range of colors in a particular area of the spectrum. The name, furthermore, is indicative of Iamos' inspiration as a future prophet and founder of a hereditary line of prophets. He is allied both to Poseidon and Apollo and his priesthood is apparently that of Zeus, although Iamos will have to wait until Herakles will have tamed and established the Olympian sanctuary. The poet, himself, in the design of his ode, plays with the theme of prophecy, structuring the poem on present, past, and future times and stating his own credentials as a prophet. One further thematic couplet introduces Eleusinian elements in the chthonic death at Thebes of the prophet Amphiaraus because of a woman and the later Persephone-Demeter duo at Syracuse in association with Zeus, who has subdued chthonic elements. This latter version is appropriate to the whole ode's modulation toward insubstantial future time in the shift from a real performance at a present celebration to a not yet realized performance at a distant place. In a similar manner, autochthony yields to motion toward foreign residence.

Naming is also a central theme in the *Ion* tragedy, which is structured upon a crisis of identity resulting from two divergent versions of the hero's parentage. His Apolline begetting occurred during the gathering of flowers at a place associated with chthonic rituals, in particular that of the maiden's descent into Hades at a source of water which was sacred to Poseidon. The other version of his begetting occurred during a maenadic ceremony at Delphi and involved a male, who despite his epithet, which is similar to that of Apollo and the yellow lover of Kreoussa, is associated with chthonic realms both via his own parentage and his recent incubation in the Trophonios cave. The tragedy presents the initiation of Ion into symbolic celestial status via a Dionysian revel during which he is rescued from a fatally toxic wine; the tokens of his identity present him as he was born, in the midst of a heraldry of serpents and chthonic monsters. The duality of his descent seems to have some meaning with regard to the role of Apollo—Dionysos at Eleusis. It is probable that such a duality implies something about the ambivalent status of toxic plants and the ecstasy of the sacred marriage which results from them. Kreoussa as the chthonic bride of Apollo is balanced in the tragedy by the child's foster mother, who is Apollo's divinely inspired Pythoness. Despite the serious patterns which structure the play's controversy about Ion's parentage, the tragedy, however, is a delightful burlesque and should not be expected to be making some kind of allegorical statement about the interrelationship of Dionysos and Apollo.